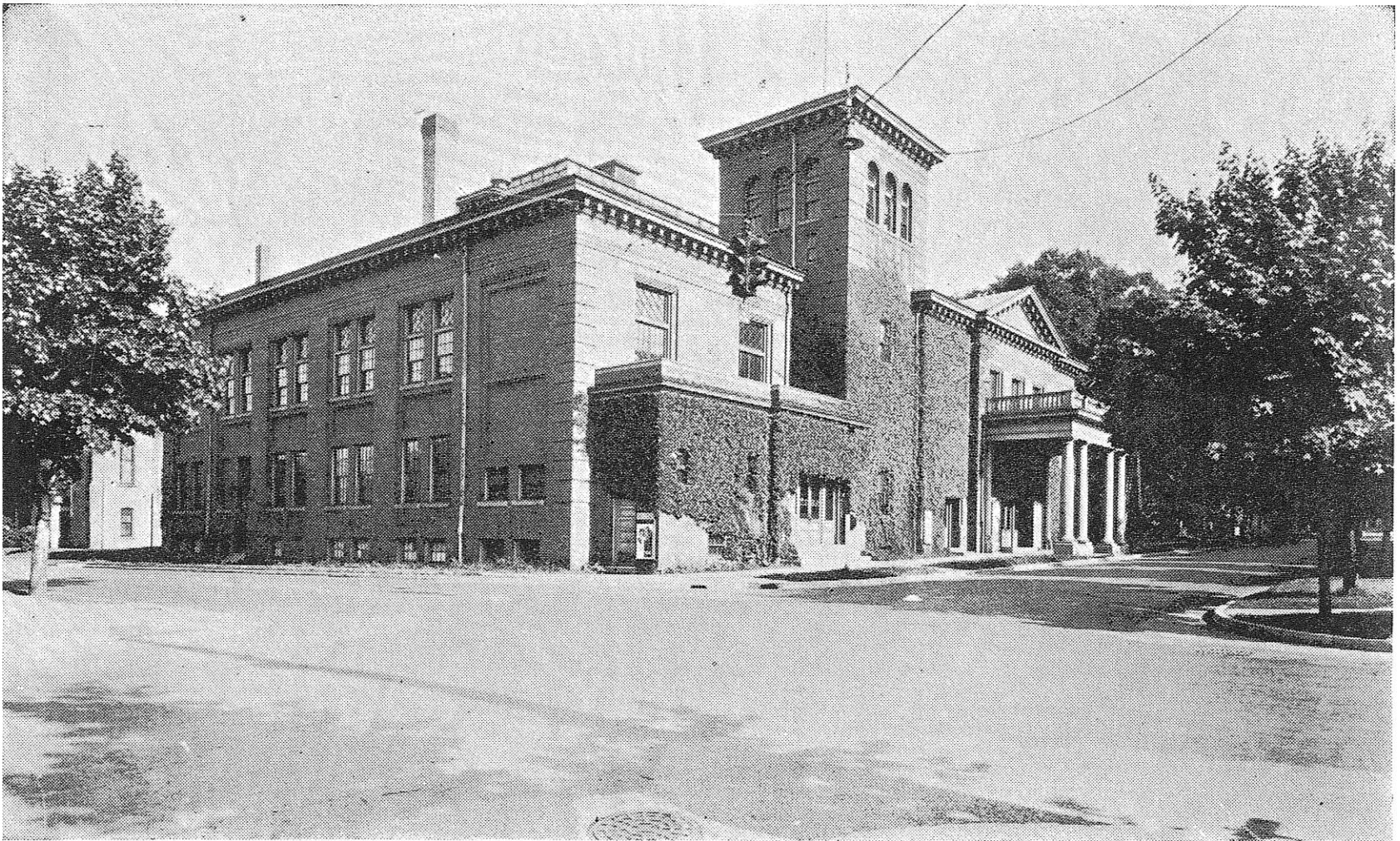


constructed in 1902 - 1903

Ramsdell Theatre and Hall • 101 Maple Street



ROTARY HALL, MANISTEE, MICH.

398

ARCHTECT – Solon S. Beman of Chicago

Thomas Jefferson Ramsdell, was determined to improve the welfare and culture of its citizens by erecting a theater for the presentation of legitimate stage productions and concerts and to provide space for public meetings and lectures.

The theater and hall were built of a deep red brick in an interesting vernacular mixture of Classical and Italianate design elements. The simple stage house was built of Chicago common brick. Ramsdell intended the building to be a work of art and an example of the latest and best in theater design. The formal front entrance features a Doric portico while the face behind it is topped by a boxed pedimented cornice. The remaining detailing, including a three story tower visually joining the theater and hall, is Italianate in style.

The interior featured a spacious lobby and lounge decorated with painted pastoral Grecian scenes. The auditorium was elaborately decorated with gilt and lights; a large, light-encircled dome in which Ramsdell's son, Frederic, painted a water-color mural of Venus, was the auditorium's key decorative feature. The theater was technically advanced for its time and could accommodate any touring show. It opened in 1903 and was used for stage shows until 1920 when it became a silent movie house. The City purchased the building in 1943, using the hall as a youth center but not immediately employing the theater. Since 1951, the theater has been used once again for stage productions by the Manistee Civic Theater and other groups. The Ramsdell Theater is the most intact of the four theaters Mr. Beman designed and the only theater with some blue prints remaining.

Manistee Commercial Historic District – listed on the National and State Registers of Historic Places